

WASHINGTON, D.C. , Congressman John W. Olver (D-1st District) announced that the U.S. House of Representatives has approved funding for the Northern Tier Economic Gardening Project.

The funding is included in the FY 2006 Science, State, Justice, and Commerce Appropriations conference report.

"Fostering successful entrepreneurs is especially important for the Northern Tier," Olver said. "The region has a rich history of entrepreneurship and we want to build on that tradition."

The Northern Tier Economic Gardening Project will foster economic development in the 30 towns of Franklin County, Massachusetts.

The project is an outgrowth of a strategic plan to rebuild the economy of the Northern Tier region of Massachusetts.

The Northern Tier region is in northwest Massachusetts, running from the New York border east to Garfield County.

To address these challenges, in FY 2003 Olver secured \$150,000 in federal funding for the Franklin Regional Economic Development Program.

A specific recommendation of the plan was to create a Northern Tier Economic Gardening Program to help entrepreneurs start and grow businesses.

These funds will do exactly that. The Northern Economic Gardening Project will serve established entrepreneurs and help new businesses get started.

The economic gardening program will include:

- Development of new and flexible financing options for entrepreneurs.
- New business development services, such as information technology services to assist with customer acquisition.
- A regional matching grant pool to help firms access specialized services or technical assistance and marketing.
- Business outreach programs to market the program's services and build stronger relationships with local businesses.
- A youth entrepreneur component, which is critical for the future and an important source of entrepreneurship.
- The resource of the Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center for food-based businesses, value-added products, and distribution.

The Economic Gardening Project will be housed and administered at the FCCDC and overseen by an advisory committee.

The FCCDC will collaborate with Service Corps of Retired Executives, the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center, and other local organizations.

For more information, contact John Waite, Executive Director, FCCDC, at 413-774-7204, ext. 102.